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UNCLAS ZAGREB 000685

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PREL HR I2

SUBJECT: TFIZ01: CROATIAN PARLIAMENT DEBATES IRAQ: NO

SURPRISES

REF: ZAGREB 669

¶1. ON MARCH 26, CROATIA'S PARLIAMENT DEBATED THE GOC POSITION ON IRAQ. DEBATE WAS LIMITED BY A STRUCTURE AGREED IN ADVANCE BY PARLIAMENT LEADERS ON MARCH 21. AT THE BEGINNING OF "QUESTION TIME," PM RACAN DELIVERED A BRIEF REPORT; PARTY LEADERS THEN HAD FIVE MINUTES EACH TO RESPOND. PM RACAN'S "REPORT" TRACKED CLOSELY WITH THE POSITION HE RELAYED PRIVATELY TO THE AMBASSADOR IN THEIR MARCH 24 MEETING (REFTEL). RACAN REPEATED HIS EXPRESSION OF "REGRET" AT THE LACK OF INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY UNITY OVER IRAQ. HE PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED HIS GOVERNMENT'S READINESS TO SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS IN HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE, PEACEKEEPING AND POST-WAR RENEWAL OF IRAQ. RACAN CALLED FOR A "REVITALIZATION" OF UN AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL BODIES AND SAID THAT THE UN SHOULD HAVE THE LEAD IN REBUILDING IRAQ.

¶2. LEADERS OF COALITION PARTIES GENERALLY BACKED THE GOC. VESNA PUSIC (HNS) SAID THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE PLEASED WITH DEVELOPING AND THEN STICKING TO A CONSISTENT POSITION. DIFFERENCES WITH THE USG HAVE BEEN EXAGGERATED; THE ONLY IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE WAS CROATIA'S DECISION NOT TO BE LISTED AS A MEMBER OF THE COALITION SUPPORTING MILITARY ACTION IN IRAQ. JOZO RADOS (LIBRA) SAID THAT THE LOCAL MEDIA HAS EXAGGERATED DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE AGREED GOC LINE AND PRESIDENT MESIC'S SPEECH. ZLATKO KRAMARIC (LS) SAID CROATIA'S POSITIONS ON THE EU AND THE U.S. MUST BE REDEFINED, HOPED THAT THE U.N. WOULD NOT REGRESS TO THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS, AND HOPED THAT TERRORISM WOULD NOT SPILL OVER TO "OUR REGION." LUKA TRCONIC (HS) EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT DAMAGE DONE TO THE UN, ON WHICH "SMALL NATIONS LIKE CROATIA" RELY.

¶3. THE OPPOSITION REACTION TO THE PM'S REPORT WAS MIXED. THE HDZ -- THE ONLY PARTY TO PUBLICLY SUPPORT THE USE OF FORCE TO DISARM IRAQ -- DID NOT USE THEIR RIGHT OF REPLY. HDZ WHIP VLADIMIR SEKS SAID HIS PARTY HAD "PUBLICLY SHARED ITS VIEWS ON THE IRAQI CRISIS AND HAD NOTHING TO ADD TO ITS POSITIONS." DC PRESIDENT MATE GRANIC CRITICIZED A LACK OF COORDINATION BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND PRESIDENT MESIC ON IRAQ, WONDERING WHY THE (STILL NOT ESTABLISHED) NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL HAD NOT BEEN USED TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE. GRANIC COMMENDED THE HIGH LEVEL OF UNITY THAT THE GOVERNMENT AND MOST POLITICAL PARTIES REACHED ON THE NEED OF UNSC APPROVAL OF THE MILITARY ACTION. IDS LEADER DAMIR KAJIN ACCUSED PRESIDENT BUSH OF "LOSING TOUCH WITH REALITY" AND STARTING A "UNILATERAL" ACTION THAT WILL PRODUCE MORE ANTI-AMERICANISM.

¶4. DRAZEN BUDISA (HSLS) SAID THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD RECONSIDER ITS FOREIGN POLICY GOALS IN THE LIGHT OF NEW DIVISIONS. RESPONDING TO RACAN'S DECLARATION THAT CROATIA WOULD SEEK TO PARTICIPATE IN POST-CONFLICT ACTIVITIES, BUDISA SAID THAT "CROATIA SHOULD NOT BE JOINING THE COUNTRIES WHICH WILL REBUILD IRAQ, BUT THOSE THAT ARE TRYING TO STOP THE WAR." THE ONLY FIREWORKS OF THE "QUESTION TIME" SESSION WERE PROVIDED BY THE HDZ RIGHT-WING EXTREMIST LJUBO CESIC ROJS, WHO ON THREE SEPARATE OCCASIONS NOISILY INTERJECTED HIS READINESS TO JOIN THE US-LED MILITARY ACTION IN IRAQ.  
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